CHAPTER FIVE

“THERE IS GREAT NEED FOR REFORMATION”: MILITARY BOOKS AND MOUNTED WARFARE

How may we reforme disorders, and avoide future dangers, of compassion of my loving countrymen, and fellows, whereof some still followe the warres, and mere love of my countrey...for if we have warres, what more convenient, then to reason and talk of warres.

Matthew Sutcliffe, *Practice, Proceedings, and Lawes of Armes* (1593)

It seemeth not a little strange to mee, that our Nation, (against all reason) should afford the serving on foote, so much, and on horse back so little.

Sir Edward Cecil, “A Demonstrance of the Cavallrie” (c. 1630)

Early Stuart England harboured a vibrant military community of professional and amateur soldiers eager to keep pace with the innovations and developments in infantry warfare emanating from Europe. Evidence suggests that the methods of drilling and exercising pikemen and musketeers depicted in books helped to improve training being carried out at muster grounds across the country, though these instructions could not rectify all the problems facing the reform of the trained bands. When examined together drill manuals and analytical treatises dedicated to infantry warfare can provide us with a fairly good picture of the evolution of English military practice in the years leading up to the Civil War. Yet the same could not be said for the relationship between printed books and the training of mounted troops. During this period, Englishmen appear to have taken little interest in the reformation of the cavalry and military literature closely mirrored the sentiments of the nation.

Of the ninety-four books and manuals printed before the English Civil War, only one, John Cruso’s *Militarie Instructions for the Cavallrie* (1632), was dedicated solely to cavalry practice. The dearth of printed material on cavalry even left Cruso to ponder the reasons why his fellow countrmen took such little interest in mounted warfare. He asked why it was that “among so many authors ancient and modern, which have written of the Art Militarie, is it not strange that hardly any hath fully
handled that which concerneth the Cavallrie?”¹ Cruso was correct in asserting that cavalry was not “fully handled” before 1632, but there were other English military writers who broached the topic in books printed between 1603 and 1645. The English, as one historian notes, stuck to their “ancient customs” as far as cavalry was concerned.² Though they were not innovative, they could still be successful in the field. There were many instances of the effective use of English horse in Ireland where heavy and light cavalry were at times, able to dominate battles against Irish foot soldiers. In the Netherlands, Leicester’s heavily armoured cavalry, carrying lances, had shown that they too could turn back experienced Spanish pistoleers and light cavalry. English cavalry, fighting alongside the Dutch army in their victories at Turnhout and Nieuwpoort, proved that they were equal to the task of fighting continental armies. But these instances tended to be the exception rather than the rule; the English saw themselves as a nation of infantrymen and by the beginning of the seventeenth century, military culture and the content of military books reflected that tradition.

In this chapter I explore the English military books and manuals that included instructions for exercising the cavalry by examining the chasm that existed between the theory and practice of mounted warfare in the years leading up to the Civil War. Although there were a number of analytical treatises with sections devoted to cavalry practice, as well as a host of horsemanship treatises offering advice on training, outfitting, and exercising horses for war, these texts appear to have had only a slight impact on English military culture before 1642. This might be the result of what Bruce Boehrer has recently described as the “social devaluation” of the horse.³ This devaluation must be seen in military terms, since the training of horses for pleasurable pursuits, such as racing and hunting, remained popular with the elite. I begin the chapter with a brief survey of the late Elizabethan military theories on cavalry warfare and an assessment of the horsemanship treatises written in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but only in so far as the latter texts related to the preparation of horse and rider for the rigours

¹ J. Cruso, Militarie instructions for the cavallrie (Cambridge: Thomas Buck and Roger Daniel, 1632), To the Reader.